

Opening Statement Chairman John Shimkus
Subcommittee on Environment and the Economy
Recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Commission on America's Nuclear
Future
February 1, 2012

Good morning. Welcome to our first Environment and the Economy Subcommittee hearing of 2012. Today I'm pleased to kick off the subcommittee's agenda on a topic many of you know I am very engaged with and passionate about: The disposal of high level nuclear waste.

As result of our successful defense programs and as a contractual obligation to taxpayers and consumers who have invested billions of dollars and counting, we as the Federal government have a responsibility to permanently dispose of nuclear waste. This debate has lead us here today to discuss the report from the Blue Ribbon Commission on America's Nuclear Future and how its recommendations might aid in moving the existing law forward while staying ahead of the curve into the future.

As I read the report over the last few days, I agreed with many of the Commission's recommendations. I too think a new organization tasked with nuclear waste management is needed. I agree access to the funds nuclear utility ratepayers and taxpayers have invested should not be squandered by political brinksmanship.

And as I've been talking about each week on the House floor - I agree that Yucca Mountain - as designated by law - remains fixed on the table as a solution to the nuclear waste debate.

In the wake of the Administration's interference with the independent technical evaluation of the repository at Yucca Mountain, the resulting Blue Ribbon Commission found what many of us have long been saying about the failed management of nuclear waste. The Commission's report correctly advises control of the Nuclear Waste Fund be removed from the purse strings of political ideologues and entrusted to "a new organization dedicated solely to implementing the waste management program" set forth under law.

It is clear the dysfunction within and between the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and the Department of Energy has rendered the current waste management structure ineffective. We simply cannot burden our children with 65 thousand - and growing - metric tons of nuclear waste simply because of a bureaucratic failure to carry out the law of the land.

Yucca Mountain remains the most shovel-ready, thoroughly studied geological repository for spent nuclear fuel. There are possibly no other 230 square miles in the world that have been examined and reexamined more by America's greatest scientific minds than Yucca Mountain.

Three decades of study, 15 billion dollars, and, quite frankly, common sense, support the current requirement to secure high-level nuclear waste on federal property, under a mountain, in a desert.

While the extensive research and millions of man hours by expert scientists and engineers has proven we can safely and securely store nuclear waste at Yucca Mountain - this debate is also about jobs. The Department of Energy estimates continuing construction at Yucca Mountain would employ 26 hundred workers, with about 11 hundred of them being jobs. Additionally, DOE estimates an almost equal number of indirect jobs, bringing the total to 7 thousand jobs in Nevada - a state currently suffering with 13% unemployment. In addition to job creation this would help stimulate the struggling Nevada economy. In 2000, research done by the University of Nevada, Las Vegas concluded the Yucca Mountain project contributed nearly \$200 million to the Nevada economy that year and similar amounts in 2001.

The reality is Yucca Mountain not only fulfills our commitment to the American taxpayer to secure high-level nuclear waste as required by law but makes a commitment to the people of Nevada to turn around a struggling economy by expanding infrastructure and creating jobs.

I'd like to welcome co-chairs of the Blue Ribbon Commission, a former colleague of ours Congressman Lee Hamilton, and Lt. General Scowcroft. I look forward to their thoughts on implementing some of these recommendations and how they fit into current law.

I also want to thank our second panel of witnesses for being here today to give us their outside perspective on the report. As those who have been a part of the process for many years, their input will be invaluable as we consider how to utilize the Commission's recommendations.